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ABSTRACT

One of a series of guides to the teaching of writing at the elementary and secondary levels, this publication describes methods used in the evaluation of students' writing. Two brief introductory sections present quotations from educators that stress the value of positive evaluative comments. The third section describes procedures, advantages, and disadvantages of 11 major evaluation methods: traditional evaluation using correction symbols and letter grades, evaluation of mechanics and form, measurement of intellectual processes in writing, teacher/student conferences, peer evaluation, self-evaluation, holistic evaluation, all-staff grading, public evaluation (by an audience beyond the classroom), T-unit evaluation, and computer analysis. A fourth section describes three types of holistic evaluation scales--an analytic scale, a dichotomous scale, and a scale for assessing personal narrative writing--and presents a chart for recording mechanical errors, a composition rating scale, questions to consider in evaluating writing, and a grading guide. The final section suggests evaluation time savers, methods for creative correcting, and various evaluation gimmicks. The publication includes a list of resources for teachers. (GT)

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A GUIDE TO EVALUATING STUDENTS' WRITING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Overview	1
II. Research Findings	2
III. Methods of Evaluation	
A. Traditional Evaluation (correction symbols and letter grades)	4
B. Final Copy Standards (a technique for evaluating mechanics and form	6
C. Measuring Intellectual Processes	8
D. Tutorial Evaluation (teacher-student conferences)	9
E. Peer Evaluation	10
F. Self Evaluation	11
G. Holistic (Wholistic) Evaluations	13
H. All-Staff Grading	14
I. Public Evaluation	15
J. T-Unit Count Evaluation Method	17
K. Computer Analysis	18
IV. Evaluation Scales	
A. Holistic Scales	
Analytic Scale	20
Dichotomous Scale	21
Personal Narrative Writing Scales	22
Chart of Mechanical Errors	27
B. Guides to Evaluation by a Teacher	
Composition Rating Scale	28
Questions for Honest Evaluation	29
Guide to Comments	30
Grading Guide	32

V. Gimmicks, Time Savers and Suggestions	
A. Time Savers	34
B. Creative Correcting	35
C. AA for Theme Correctors	36
D. Suggestions and Gimmicks	37
VI. Bibliography	
A. Sources	40
B. Resources (annotated bibliography)	41

I. OVERVIEW

Marking papers thus becomes a severe test of the teacher's own power of communication. Here is no mechanical process, rather, here is a test of the competence of the teacher of English to demonstrate the skill he has as a teacher.

-Lou L. LaBrant

Use the red pencil to show the good idea, the colorful phrase, the active verb, the effective organization of thought.

-Walter Thomas Petty

The importance of personal writing in the elementary school is established. How to 'measure' progress in personal writing is not as clearly established.

-Sara Lundsteen

The process of learning to communicate effectively is, of course, an extremely complex one, and thus the process of evaluation is equally complex.

-Jean M. LePere

Sensible evaluation, then, may be said to be a reflection of meaningful and creative instruction.

-Jean M. LePere

II. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In attempting to find an overview of the research done on the effects of evaluation, we see two main points surface. The first is that students hate and fear writing because of corrections. The second is that positive comments do more good than negative comments. These two main points are made several times in various studies, as evidenced by the following remarks.

The art of the teacher--at its best--is the reinforcement of good things.

-Daniel Dietrich, 1972

Negative criticism and fear that one's feelings and thoughts will be judged, censored or considered unacceptable or unworthy tend to inhibit creative writing.

-William Dell, 1972

The eternal problem of the teacher of writing is how to remove the sting of correction, how to lessen the chagrin of the adolescent who has revealed his ignorance. The teacher can never be certain of the writer's ability to take criticism of anything as personal as his language. . .

-W. J. Dusel, 1965

[Correcting] not only does no good, but positive harm. Its most common effect is to make the majority of students hate and fear writing.

-Paul Diederich, 1964

...think of your students and mine and of the blood letting which our red pencils have caused. From our hands they receive their brain children dripping with gore. Is it any wonder that they shudder and wish to throw the bloody messes into the most convenient trashcan...?

-R. Stanley Peterson, 1965

If we see our role as primarily that of correcting, we discourage the writing process. Students need to be encouraged in what they write if they are to develop into more effective writers. We should, in evaluating writing, mark a few mechanical problems, but reserve the weight of our judgement for raising questions to the writer. Raising questions can demonstrate an interest in what he has to say and open the way to dialog about the writing process.

-Alan M. McLeod, 1975

As researchers continue to try to improve their own methods of evaluation, they will find the following considerations helpful, not only to the authenticity of their research but also to the teachers and students who benefit from their research:

1. Evaluation should be integral to the larger framework of philosophical and psychological beliefs from education.
2. Evaluation should not be deterministic and limiting to children and teachers.
3. Evaluation should take into account the child's standards along with the adult's standards.
4. Evaluation should stress the finding of values in writing rather than the criticism of weaknesses.

-Sara Lundsteen, 1976

III. METHODS OF EVALUATION

In this section are descriptions of major methods used for evaluation of student papers. Most teachers will realize that they use several of these methods already. Each teacher must decide which methods or combination of methods to use for each particular assignment. It is hoped that teachers will feel free to adapt these methods to suit their own personal styles and needs.

Although much of the research and writing on evaluation is negative, most authors seem to agree with Paul B. Diederich that it is necessary. However, there does appear to be a distinction between evaluating, grading and correcting. Evaluation is an on-going process designed to help students be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. It is the description of the writing as well as of the individual growth of the writer. Grading is the act of assigning a letter or number to represent the quality of the writing. Even though a grade may be based on some objective criteria, usually teacher judgment enters into the process. A grade is final and tells the student nothing about the strengths or weaknesses of the written work. Correcting involves pointing out the student's mistakes.

Most of the methods in the following section are concerned with measuring individual growth as well as with providing positive ways for teachers to encourage students' strengths as writers.

A. TRADITIONAL EVALUATION (correction symbols and letter grading)

Definition

Probably the most common method of evaluating student writing includes the following steps: the student hands in a final copy; the teacher, without any discussion with the student, marks the faults in the paper, makes some terminal comments and assigns a grade; the teacher returns the paper to the student.

Advantages

1. The teacher can develop and follow a set of correction symbols in marking all papers.
2. Papers can be read and marked in class sets so the teacher can get an idea of the general quality of the whole set.
3. Grading can be done outside of the classroom without the students present.

4. Students become familiar with a set of markings which are used by many teachers throughout all grades.

Disadvantages

1. The method emphasizes the negative aspects of a paper and evaluation is based largely on mechanical errors.
2. Students become overwhelmed and discouraged by a paper which has marks all over it.
3. Students usually do not look seriously at the markings and there is little improvement of errors in future papers.
4. Students begin to feel that good writing is based on specific mechanical improvements rather than on quality of idea and style.
5. Students may understand the markings, but not know how to avoid the error indicated.

Note: The advantages of this method rest largely with the teacher and the disadvantages with the student.

Procedure

Included here is a list of various correction symbols which teachers often use in this method of evaluation. It is not complete, but does suggest the kinds of markings which may be used. (Note that the markings all tell the student what he did wrong.)

- | | |
|--------|---|
| RO | You have a run-on sentence which is more than one sentence put together with only a comma between or no separating mark at all. |
| SF | Sentence fragment. |
| Unity | You have no main idea, or you have brought in ideas unrelated to your topic. |
| Detail | You have not included a sufficient number of supporting details to develop your topic. |
| Coh | You have not made your ideas flow smoothly and logically. |
| ¶ | You have not paragraphed correctly. |
| ab | You wrote an abbreviation instead of the word itself. As a general rule, write out all numbers under one hundred. Do not use symbols or abbreviations such as "&" or "etc." |

agr	Your subject and verb or a pronoun and its antecedent do not agree. (i.e., They is....)
awk	You have stated your idea in an awkward way.
cap	You have an error in capitalization.
p	You left out a punctuation mark or placed one incorrectly.
person	You have not been consistent in your use of pronouns.
rep	You have carelessly repeated words or phrases.
sp	You have misspelled a word.
syl	You have not divided a word into syllables correctly.
tense	You have changed the tense of your verb without good reason.
usage	You have used a non-standard or incorrect word form.
?	Is this statement true or accurate?
^	You left out something here.
//	You did not express parallel ideas in parallel form.
ref	Your reference is not clear. To what work or idea does this refer?
WC	Your word choice could be better to express your ideas effectively. (i.e., <u>gazed</u> instead of <u>looked</u> .)
vary	You need to vary sentence structure to avoid monotony.
wordy	You use a lot of words to say very little. Make it concise.

B. FINAL COPY STANDARDS (a technique for evaluating mechanics and form)

Assumptions

Teachers and other readers of student writing complain most vehemently about the mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.) and neatness of student papers.

Students know more about mechanics, usage, and neatness than they usually show. Like the rest of us, they tend to be lazy.

Students will pay attention to matters of mechanics and form if it is made worth their while. Taking the first effort at a final copy, marking it up, giving it a grade, and handing it back, does not make it worth their while. They tend to avoid careful work.

Setting Standards

Teachers of writing and teachers who require writing in their classes should set up standards for an acceptable paper, much as an editor might require a writer to submit a manuscript in an acceptable form.

Standards could vary, depending on the needs of the teacher, the ages of the students, and the needs of the students. A school-wide set of standards could be set up.

For high school students, a simple standard might be no spelling errors, no incomplete sentences, no errors in punctuation, etc.

Rules for acceptable manuscript form could be made clear.

Evaluation

Teachers, groups of students, or lay readers (aids) could check for errors.

A paper would not be accepted until the standards were met.

Students would have to write their paper over and over until the standards were met.

Advantages

Students soon get in the habit of turning in neat, readable work.

Students know what is expected of them. The rules do not change.

Responsibility is placed on students for cleaning up their papers.

Disadvantages

This technique tends to emphasize mechanics, spelling, etc., rather than quality of thought.

C. MEASURING INTELLECTUAL PROCESSES IN WRITING

If writing is thinking, one way to describe writing is to examine the intellectual processes at work in a paper. One way to measure growth in writing is to measure changes in the uses of these intellectual processes.

The Processes

Lee Odell, in "Measuring Changes in Intellectual Processes as One Dimension of Growth in Writing," lists six intellectual processes that may be examined. (In Evaluating Writing, Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell, eds., NCTE, 1977.)

Focus: A writer segments experience; he chooses what to observe, much as a camera focuses on a face, or on background.

Contrast: A writer notices how some item focused upon is different from something else.

Classification: A writer notices similarities and makes comparisons, similes, and metaphors.

Change: A writer observes how something has become different over time.

Physical Context: A writer displays the physical context to influence feelings and manipulate attitudes.

Sequence: A writer observes the order of events or details in time or space.

Evaluating Writing

Writing may be evaluated in at least two ways, using this emphasis.

1. A single paper can be described by counting, say, the number of different foci, or the number of different contrasts, etc.

The appropriateness of each of the foci or contrasts can also be judged.

2. A student's progress can be measured by comparing his work as he matures.

The growth in the intellectual aspects of writing can be measured by comparing the number of uses of each process and by comparing the general appropriateness of the uses of those processes in different papers.

Note: Any student, even in a weak paper, uses these processes. If we need to find the positive, we can focus on them and have something to praise honestly.

We can describe the thinking students do in their papers.

D. TUTORIAL EVALUATION (teacher-student conferences)

Definition

Student writing may be evaluated one to one if time is allowed in class. In a tutorial a teacher reads through a paper with the student present and makes comments and suggestions. The paper is marked during the conference. Students may discuss teacher suggestions and defend themselves if they feel strongly about some part of their paper.

Organizations

In a writing workshop classroom, all students may be writing or preparing to write while conferences are being held.

Conferences on a paper in a literature class or other academic class may be set up as students read or do other work.

In any class a week could be set aside for writing a paper. Conferences could be held at several points during the writing process.

Conferences could be set up for all papers or could be set up for only one or two papers a semester.

Note: Students may see the teacher on a first come first serve basis, on a schedule, immediately (if emergency help is needed), or as a teacher circulates around a classroom.

Advantages

The classroom atmosphere tends to be personal and warm.

Evaluation can be flexible (according to student needs) yet fair.

Students do not have to wait as long for feedback on their writing. Questions can be answered immediately and confusions clarified.

Students can more easily be made responsible ("fix it, kid") at all stages of the writing process.

Teachers seldom have to take papers home.

Disadvantages

Substantial time must be allowed during class for writing and conferencing.

The teacher tends to become the only audience.

If teachers are not careful, they can do too much for the student, almost writing the paper for him (especially in terms of ideas, organization, or details).

E. PEER EVALUATION

Definition

Peer grading utilizes students as lay readers. Students read others' papers, pointing out mechanical errors and problems of content and organization.

Organization

There are several ways to accomplish peer grading. They range from a simple exchange of students' writing to a complex system of evaluation. We will give examples of some methods. There are many other techniques available to achieve the same result.

1. Place a sample composite on an overhead projector. Have the students discuss and critique the paper.
2. Duplicate a paper from each assignment. Have the students grade the paper for homework and discuss it the next day.
3. Organize into writing workshops. See "Writing Workshop Groups." (On Righting Writing, pp. 55-58.) Each group should include students with varied strengths. Each group is given a set of papers to evaluate, which are then returned to the authors. Before attempting this method, the students must be given a set of guidelines to follow. Also, students should be prepared with the necessary group skills.
4. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Exchange papers and read carefully. As a group answer:
 - a. Which is the best section? Why?
 - b. Identify a sentence or paragraph that needs revision and revise it.
 - c. Pick one thing that the writer should work on to improve the composition. (Berea City School District, Berea, Ohio)

5. Prepare a form indicating criteria for acceptable papers. Attach the form to every student paper. On the form place four empty boxes in which four student readers evaluate the theme. Each student evaluator assigns a grade, justifies it and signs his/her name. The student writer then revises the paper according to the criticisms. (Francine Hardaway, in College English, January 1975.)
6. Have each student exchange paper with a partner and then perform the following tasks:
 - a. Tell one main point or feeling, quickly.
 - b. Summarize the paper in one sentence.
 - c. Choose one word from the writing to summarize the paper.
 - d. Choose one word not from the writing to summarize the paper.
 - e. Return papers and discuss. This allows for immediate feedback. (Peter Elbow, "Center of Gravity Response.")

Advantages

1. Students learn from each other's writing.
2. Proof reading skills are sharpened.
3. The teacher does not have to correct every paper.
4. Students learn to write for an audience other than the teacher.
5. The teacher is able to spend more time on complex writing problems.
6. Students get to write more frequently.

Disadvantages

1. Students must be able to identify writing errors or problem areas.
2. Some techniques demand student training and preparation.
3. Periodic individual conferences are necessary.

F. SELF-EVALUATION

Description

In the self-evaluation process, students comment on their own writing and establish individual goals.

By setting their goals, students assume more responsibility for their own work. This procedure may be helpful as it leads to greater self reliance and independence.

After the material for the paper is assembled, the child writes a rough draft; keeping in mind the organization of the paper, he may use chronological order, cause and effect, need and plan, and so forth. The child then assesses the paper for the development of content. He checks it for the mechanics (spelling, handwriting, punctuation, grammar, usage.) He rereads it to see if the style is appropriate for the purpose. Following this, the final draft is written and presented to the teacher or the group for evaluation. This last draft is carefully written in terms of organization, content, mechanics and style.

The following are questions which may form a basis for self evaluation procedures.

1. How much time did you spend on this paper?
2. What did you try to do to improve or experiment with on this paper? How successful were you? If you have questions about what you were trying to do, what are they?
3. What are the strengths of your paper? Place a squiggly line beside those passages you feel are very good.
4. What are the weaknesses, if any, of your paper? Place an X beside passages you would like your teacher to correct or revise. Place an X over any punctuation, spelling, usage, etc., where you need help or clarification.
5. What one thing will you do to improve your next piece of writing? Or what kind of experimentation in writing would you like to try? If you would like some information related to what you want to do, write down your questions.
6. (Optional) What grade would you give yourself on this composition? Justify it.

Advantages

1. Self-evaluation helps students assume the responsibility for assessing their own writing as they become their own editors.
2. The objectives of writing are broadened and expectations become heightened.

3. Through self-evaluation, there is a promotion of self reliance, independence, autonomy and creativity.

Disadvantages

1. Teachers may feel uncomfortable when they let go of power, control and authority.

Mary H. Beaven, "Individualized Goal Setting, Self-Evaluation and Peer Evaluation," Evaluating Writing, NCTE, 1977.

G. HOLISTIC (WHOLISTIC) EVALUATION

Definition

Holistic evaluation attempts to assess the overall quality of a composition, and although various aspects of content and form are considered, no marking and tallying of these aspects is required. Charles R. Cooper describes holistic evaluation as:

. . . a guided procedure for sorting or ranking written pieces. The rater takes a piece of writing and either (1) matches it with another piece in a graded series of pieces or (2) scores it for the prominence of certain features important to that kind of writing or (3) assigns it a letter or number grade. The placing, scoring, or grading occurs quickly, impressionistically, after the rater has practiced the procedure with other raters. The rater does not make corrections or revisions in the paper. Holistic evaluation is usually guided by a holistic scoring guide which describes each feature and identifies high, middle, and low quality levels for each feature. .

Below is a listing of several types of holistic evaluation. For a complete description of two specific types see All-Staff Grading (Diederich, 1974) and T-Unit Analysis which follow. In addition, for those marked with an asterisk, the scale which is used in that method can be found reproduced in Section V of this booklet.

Essay Scale

*Analytic Scale (Diederich)

*Dichotomous Scale

Feature Analysis

Primary Trait Scoring

*Personal Narrative Writing Scales

Center of Gravity Response (see Peer Evaluation)

H. ALL-STAFF GRADING

Definition

The All-Staff Grading method addresses two questions: If grades are required, how can we grade in the most objective and reliable manner? In addition, how can we avoid the dangers of over-grading shown to be so damaging to a student's attitudes and performance? This method does provide reliable and defensible letter grades or scores to measure a pupil's current achievement in writing ability in relation to his/her peers.

Organization

All members of a department or grade level read samples of students' writing taken under controlled conditions at the end of each grading period. Each student writes two essays on assigned topics, each of which are read anonymously by two graders. Teachers agree before-hand on criteria to be considered and also on guidelines as to the percentage of A's, B's, etc., expected from their specific student population.

Teachers are encouraged to work rapidly and to trust their first overall impressions, which tends to increase the reliability of their grading. No written comments or corrections are permitted on the papers themselves since they would tend to bias second readings.

Usually two grades are given to each student. A standard score shows where the student stands in relation to the total school population. This score will move and increase as the student progresses through school and his/her writing ability matures. A group score shows where the student stands in relation to his/her specific age and ability group, the 10th grade remedial student for example. This score usually corresponds most closely to the grade actually given. Any students who are dissatisfied with their initial grade are allowed to take the test again, and the highest score will stand.

Advantages

1. The key element in this method is its reliability. With a minimum amount of training time, teachers become quite skilled in grading student compositions in an unbiased, objective manner.
2. It becomes unnecessary to grade continuously during the quarter or term. The focus becomes one of evaluation rather than grading and an emphasis can be placed on diagnosing and correcting each student's writing problems.

3. It allows teachers to concentrate on the positive aspects of a student's writing.
4. Because papers are graded anonymously, it completely eliminates bias either for or against particular students.
5. The method can be applied successfully at various grade levels and by disciplines other than English where essay measurements are used or writing of any kind is required.
6. The method produces reliable scores of pupil performance which can be used to compare an entire school's or district's standing and thus provides a practical way of dealing with the issue of accountability.

Disadvantages

1. The method is limited. It provides grades but does not diagnose the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student.
2. Total staff cooperation is essential to the success of this method.

I. PUBLIC EVALUATION

Definition

Public evaluation involves students writing for a specific audience, usually one outside the confines of their own classroom. It is this audience that ultimately evaluates the writing.

Organization

Obviously in projects as diverse as ads for local businesses and a magazine of ten years' standing such as Foxfire, the type of organizations are myriad. Basically the children have to perceive their audience, its needs and wants. Pupils must always know that their work will be for others to read. The purpose is not to surprise the student by publishing a paper that was not written for that purpose. The most successful projects have included students in all steps from initial ideas, to writing, editing, layout, and even printing and distribution. The teacher becomes an aid in the process of getting articles ready for publication, not the final judge.

Types of Publications

1. Advertisements for local businesses to be posted in stores or published by the local newspaper or shopping guide.
2. Guide to community points of interest to be left in local motels or gas stations for tourists to read. (Suggested by Nan Dougherty)
3. "How our Home Works" booklets to be written about students' own homes, to be read by family, baby sitters, etc. (everything from portraits of family members to what to do if the furnace fails).
4. Foxfire-type of publication. Articles and photographs about community, traditions, people, how-to articles, etc. Professionally printed. Supported by sales of magazine.
5. School literary magazines--emphasis on fictional works.
6. School newspapers or even "unit" newspapers. Emphasis on factual reporting.
7. Local newspaper--if your community doesn't have one, students can fill the gap.
8. Letters of all kinds. (Fan letters, asking for samples, information, complaints, etc.)
9. Contest writing--"in 25 words or less..."
10. Books made for young children. Books are then donated to school library to be checked out by interested students.

Advantages

1. These activities usually mean something to students and they are eager to do a fine job.
2. Because content is all important, the teacher does not have to give students reasons for making corrections. They don't want to look stupid.
3. This method often develops skills, self-confidence and a certain amount of independence in writing.
4. The student develops a sensitivity for other writers as well as for different audiences.
5. The value of positive feedback can be enormous.

Disadvantages (for the teacher)

1. Extra time.
 2. Extra work.
 3. Extra money (possibly).
- I. T-UNIT EVALUATION METHOD (a way of determining sophistication in student writing through a counting of independent clauses and words per clause)

Definition

T-Unit means Terminal Unit. A T-unit is an independent clause plus all attached or embedded dependent clauses. T-unit analysis has two steps: counting both the number of T-units and the number of words in a paper. Dividing the number of T-units into the number of words per paper indicates the number of words per T-unit. T-unit norms established in research by Kellogg Hunt, et. al., suggest that the more words per T-unit, the more sophisticated the writer.

i.e.		4th grade	8th grade	12th grade	Adult
	WPTU	8.60	11.50	14.40	20.30

Procedure

How to actually count T-units:

1. A T-unit is an independent clause plus all attached or embedded dependent clauses. Do not count dependent clauses separately.
2. Independent clauses occurring as directly quoted discourses count as T-units. Speaker tags are discarded.
3. Sentence fragments with single words missing are counted as T-units with the missing word supplied.
4. Sentence fragments which are extensions or precursors to other sentences are counted as part of the T-unit to which they would most reasonably attach.
5. Unintelligible word strings or a-syntactic expressions are discarded.

Example:

(Moby Dick was a white whale,) (and he had severed Ahab's leg,) (and Ahab was enraged,) (and Ahab prodded the crew of the Pequod,) (and the crew then spent all their energies in the pursuit of Moby Dick.)
(5 T-Units)

Format for a T-unit Analysis Sheet:

Paper #	Total No. Words	Total No. T-Units	WPTU

Advantages

1. It is an effective way to evaluate the sentence style and sentence variety of individuals or a whole class.
2. High school students can learn the method and count the T-units in their own or someone else's paper. This gets them attending to the sentence more and aids them in better grasping the idea of sentence structure.
3. It is a specific way of measuring progress in student writing from beginning to end of semester/year.

Disadvantages

1. Time consuming!
2. It is a very specific form of evaluation and does not measure style, quality of idea, mechanics, etc.

K. COMPUTER ANALYSIS

Definition

Computer grading involves feeding student themes into a computer for analysis.

Organization

Student themes are typed on computer cards. Data banks for each assignment have been created by the teacher and the themes are analyzed on the basis of these data.

The data banks may include such things as token count (number of words), type count (different words), word frequency, sentence length, number of connectors, syntax complexity, usage and capitalization rules.

The next step may be for the computer to compare the word choice to the standard word frequency index to determine the maturity of the word choice. Also, it could make an analysis of the syntactical complexity to determine the grade level of the writing.

Advantages

1. The computer can judge "syntactical complexity" more easily than a person.
2. The computer is completely objective.
3. The computer can easily compute standard frequency indexes and standard deviations.

Disadvantages

1. The teacher must have an available computer.
2. Data banks must be created for each assignment.
3. A computer analyzes, but cannot evaluate themes.
4. Assignments have to be typed on computer cards.
5. The computer cannot judge style or organization.
6. Only one component of writing is considered.
7. The information from the computer must be applied to be useful.

IV. EVALUATION SCALES

A. HOLISTIC SCALES

Included in this section are a variety of scales which teachers might use to aid them in evaluating student compositions. Some are designed for holistic evaluations while others evaluate specific skills. These scales will probably be of the most value at the secondary level because the most effective evaluation in the elementary grades consists of short individual comments on each student paper.

An Analytic Scale

An analytic scale is a holistic evaluation device which lists the prominent features or characteristics of writing in a particular mode. The list of features ordinarily ranges from four to ten with high-mid-low points on a scoring line.

General Merit	Low	Middle	High
Quality and development of ideas	2	4	6 8 10
Organization, relevance, movement	2	4	6 8 10
Style, flavor, individuality	1	2	3 4 5
Wording and phrasing	1	2	3 4 5
Mechanics			
Grammar, sentence structure	1	2	3 4 5
Punctuation, capitals	1	2	3 4 5
Spelling	1	2	3 4 5
Handwriting, neatness	1	2	3 4 5
Total			

Listed below is an explanation of the intent of the high-mid-low points along each feature scoring line. Readers learn to use the scale by studying the explanations of high-mid-low values for each feature, trying the scale on pieces of student writing and discussing the results.

High. The student has given some thought to the topic and writes what he really thinks. He discusses each main point long enough to show clearly what he means. He supports each main point with arguments, examples, or details; he gives the reader some reason for

believing it. His points are clearly related to the topic and to the main idea or impression he is trying to convey. No necessary points are overlooked and there is no padding.

Middle. The paper gives the impression that the student does not really believe what he is writing or does not fully understand what it means. He tries to guess what the teacher wants, and writes what he thinks will get by. He does not explain his points very clearly or make them come alive to the reader. He writes what he thinks will sound good, not what he believes or knows.

Low. It is either hard to tell what points the student is trying to make or else they are so silly that, if he had only stopped to think, he would have realized that they made no sense. He is only trying to get something down on paper. He does not explain his points; he only asserts them and then goes on to something else, or he repeats them in slightly different words. He does not bother to check his facts, and much of what he writes is obviously untrue. No one believes this sort of writing--not even the student who wrote it.

P. B. Diederich, "Problems and Possibilities of Research in the Teaching of Written Composition," In Research Design and the Teaching of English, Urbana, Illinois, National Council of Teachers of English, 1964. [ED 001 917]

A Dichotomous Scale

A dichotomous scale is a series of statements which can be answered yes or no. Such a scale is valuable for holistic scoring. It would probably not yield reliable scores on individuals, but is quite promising for making gross distinctions between the quality of batches of essays.

SCORE SHEET

	Yes	No	
Content I.	_____	_____	1. Ideas themselves are insightful.
	_____	_____	2. Ideas are creative or original.
	_____	_____	3. Ideas are rational or logical.
	_____	_____	4. Ideas are expressed with clarity.
Organization II.	_____	_____	5. There is a thesis.
	_____	_____	6. Order of thesis idea is followed throughout the essay.
	_____	_____	7. Thesis is adequately developed.
	_____	_____	8. Every paragraph is relevant to the thesis.
	_____	_____	9. Each paragraph has a controlling idea.
	_____	_____	10. Each paragraph is developed with relevant and concrete details.
Mechanics III.	_____	_____	11. The details that are included are well ordered.
	_____	_____	12. There are many misspellings.
	_____	_____	13. There are serious punctuation errors.
	_____	_____	14. Punctuation errors are excessive.
	_____	_____	15. There are errors in the use of verbs.
	_____	_____	16. There are errors in the use of pronouns.
	_____	_____	17. There are errors in the use of modifiers.
	_____	_____	18. There are distracting errors in word usage.
	_____	_____	19. The sentences are awkward.

Arthur M. Cohen, "Assessing College Students' Ability to Write Compositions," Research in the Teaching of English 7, 1973, pp. 356-71.

Personal Narrative Writing Scales

Scales can be useful for prediction, placement, exemption, or growth measurement as well as a guide to informal diagnosis or feedback. Scales can also make teachers more confident about the human responses they have to actual pieces of writing. The following scales require no more than two minutes per paper and can provide a public statement of the general features of writing stressed in a particular course/paper and provide a focus

for students' examination of their own writing and the writing of peers.

I. General Qualities:

A. Author's Role

The author's role is the relationship of the author to the subject, incident, or person. In autobiography the author writes about himself/herself. He/she is the main participant. Most of the time he/she will use the pronouns, I, me, we, us. In biography the author writes about some other person. He/she is not involved in what happens; he/she is just an observer. He/she uses the pronouns, he, she, him, her, it, they, them.

High The author keeps his/her correct role of either participant or observer throughout.

Middle In autobiography, a few noticeable distracting times the author talks too much about another person's actions; or, in biography, he/she talks too much about his/her own actions.

Low The author talks about himself/herself or others as participant or observer anytime he/she pleases so that you can barely tell whether it is supposed to be autobiography or biography. There is confusion as to author's role. He/she is not consistently either observer or participant.

B. Style or Voice

High The author states what he/she really thinks and feels. Expressing personal experiences, the writer comes through as an individual, and his/her work seems like his/hers and his/hers alone. The voice we hear in the piece really interests us.

Middle The author uses generalizations or abstract language, seldom including personal details and comments. While the piece may be correct, it lacks the personal touch. The voice seems bland, careful, a little flat, and not very interesting.

Low We don't really hear a recognizable voice in the piece. The style seems flat and lifeless.

C. Central Figure

Details about the central figure make him/her seem "real." The character is described physically and as a person.

High The central figure is described in such detail that he/she is always "real" for you.

Middle The central character can be "seen," but is not as real as he/she could be.

Low The central character is not a real living person; he/she is just a name on a page. You cannot see him/her or understand him/her.

D. Background

The setting of the action is detailed so that it seems to give the events a "real" place in which to happen.

High The action occurs in a well-detailed place that you can almost see.

Middle Sometimes the setting seems vivid and real; but sometimes the action is just happening, and you are not really aware of what the setting is.

Low The action occurs without any detailed setting. You see the action, but you cannot see it in a certain place.

E. Sequence

The order of events is clear, giving the reader a precise view of the sequence of incidents.

High The order of events is always clear to you even if at times the author might talk about the past or the future.

Middle A few times it is not clear which event happened first.

Low You really cannot figure out which event comes first or goes after any other event.

F. Theme

The author chooses the incidents and details for some reason. There seems to be some purpose behind the choice of subject matter, some theme holding it all together and relating the parts to the whole. There seems to be a point to it.

High The importance of the author's subject is either directly explained to you or it is implied in a way that makes it clear.

Middle You can see why the author's subject is important to him/her, but it is not as clearly stated or implied as it could be.

Low You cannot figure out why the subject is important to the author.

II. Diction, Syntax, and Mechanics

A. Wordings

High Words are employed in a unique and interesting way. While some of the language might be inappropriate, the author seems thoughtful and imaginative.

Middle Common, ordinary words are used in the same old way. The paper has some trite, over-worked expressions. The author, on the other hand, may work so hard at being different that he/she sounds like a talking dictionary, in which case he/she, also, merits this rating.

Low The word choice is limited and immature. Sometimes words are even used incorrectly--the wrong word is used.

B. Syntax

High The sentences are varied in length and structure. The author shows a confident control of sentence structure. The paper reads smoothly from sentence to sentence. There are no run-together sentences or sentence fragments.

Middle The author shows some control of sentence structure and only occasionally writes a sentence which is awkward or puzzling. Almost no run-ons and fragments.

Low Many problems with sentence structure. Sentences are short and simple in structure, somewhat childlike and repetitious in their patterns. There may be run-ons and fragments.

C. Usage

High There are no obvious errors in usage. The author shows he/she is familiar with the standards of edited written English.

Middle A few errors in usage appear in the paper, showing the author has not quite been consistent in using standard forms.

Low The writing is full of usage errors.

D. Punctuation

High The author consistently uses appropriate punctuation.

Middle Most of the time the writer punctuates correctly.

Low The writing contains many punctuation errors.

E. Spelling

High All words are spelled correctly.

Middle A few words are misspelled.

Low Many words are misspelled.

Charles F. Cooper, "Holistic Evaluation of Writing,"
Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging,
National Council of Teachers of English, 1977, pp. 21-
24.

	CHART OF MECHANICAL ERRORS												Name _____	TOTAL
	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier	P. # Ident- fier		
SPELLING (SP)														
SENTENCE FRAGMENT SF i.e. (Walking on the road)														
RUN ONS (2 or more clauses run together)														
COMMA (not used, when should be, or overused)														
OTHER PUNCTUATION (';::!?)														
AGREEMENT N-V (i.e. They <u>is</u>); N-Pro (one of the boys forgot <u>their</u> book)														
TENSE (i.e. switching of tense. The sky <u>is</u> blue. The clouds <u>were</u> puffy.)														
CAPITALIZATION (i.e. My <u>Mom</u> / I am in <u>Biology</u> .)														
WORD CHOICE/VOCABULARY (i.e. nice, good)														
ANTECEDENT (i.e. The boys discovered <u>it</u> .) (What is it?)														
PRONOUN CASE (i.e. She gave the book to Betty and <u>I</u> . <u>Him</u> and I went to the store)														
HOMONYMS (i.e. to, two, too, there, they're, their)														
OTHER														
TOTAL # WORDS:														

B. GUIDES TO EVALUATION BY A TEACHER

Composition Rating Scale*

This scale sheet, used in the Cleveland Heights high schools, has been used effectively in the hands of students as a means for noting progress. The sheet is attached to each theme the student hands in so that he has the opportunity to gauge his own work prior to having others read it. When compositions are returned, he sees at once from the scale facets of his work that need strengthening as well as those in which he has improved. Student readers, whether individuals or in committees, find in the scale the general criteria needed to judge intelligently the themes they read.

Assignment	Student	Date
Purpose		
A. Content--50%		
Convincing persuasive, sincere, enthusiastic, certain		Unconvincing
Organized logical, planned, orderly, systematic		Jumbled
Thoughtful reflective, percep- tive, probing, inquiring		Superficial
Broad comprehensive, com- plete, extensive range of data, inclusive		Limited
Specific concrete, definite, detailed, exact		Vague
B. Style--30%		
Fluent expressive, colorful		Restricted
Cultivated varied, mature, de- scriptive, smooth, appropriate		Awkward

C. Conventions--20%

Correct Writing Form	Incorrect Form
paragraphing, heading, punctuation, spelling	
Conventional Grammar	Substandard
sentence structure, agreement, references, etc.	

*Used in Cleveland Heights' University Heights City School District, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Used by permission of Leonard Freyman, English-Library Coordinator.

Some Honest Questions (for evaluating writing)

1. A writer promises to do something. What does the writer promise to do in his paper? Can we state that promise in our own words? Does he keep his promise.
2. Is there a perceivable order to the presentation of his feelings and ideas? Can we describe that order? Does that order of presentation show how the writer has felt and thought about his subject? Can we suggest better strategies than the one the writer has chosen? If so, how and why?
3. Has the writer omitted any important details or arguments that would contribute to our understanding of his understanding and feelings? Has he included details or arguments not connected with the feelings and ideas he is discussing? Where could he amplify and where could he delete? How could he clarify his feelings and ideas?
4. Is the writer's attitude towards his feelings and ideas convincing? Is he filling space or is he writing about feelings and ideas that matter to him? How can we tell?
5. Is the language of the paper appropriate to the author's voice and subject? Is the language free of clichés, jargon, and stock phrases? If the writer bends or breaks the conventions of language, what are his reasons for doing so?
6. Does each paragraph signal clearly to the reader the direction the writer's ideas and feelings are moving? And does each paragraph develop and complete the idea or feeling that it introduces?

7. Are the rhythms and patterns of sentences appropriate to the writer's subject and voice? Where could he improve upon those patterns to make clearer his ideas and feelings? Does he use the passive voice excessively? If so, is that usage justified?
8. Has he observed the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization? If he has not, is there justification for his not doing so?

and finally: "...we still have to answer the question...: Was the writer's effort worth it? When we have finished reading do we say 'so what?' Or do we commend the writer's efforts and suggest improvements."

Robert Bain, "Reading Student Papers," College Composition and Communication, XXV (October 1974), 307-309.

Guide to Comments

Listed below are some words which are often used in commenting on student papers. Each word is explained and then several methods of scaling these are included.

Intention--Does the student know and demonstrate that he has a purpose in this theme? Does his title suggest his intention? Does he give the reader some indication at the very beginning? Does the theme end with a direct or implied statement of the intention?

Content--Does the student have the required information, recognizable in his use of example, illustration, analogy, comparison or contrast?

Reasoning--Is there some flow in idea and argument, made clear and vigorous by proper logic and accurate transitions?

Language--Does he use language with precision and clarity, with effectiveness, and some attention to pleasing sound and rhythm? Does he observe standard grammatical forms?

Manuscript--Is there neatness in format, in margins and signatures and legibility?

Effort--Does this theme represent an honest and worthwhile attempt commensurate with the ability of the student?

Accuracy--Does this theme conform to standard practices in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization?

Scoring for each category might include these possibilities:

1. The simple device of a plus mark, a check, or a minus.
2. A point system of 1 2 3 4 5.
3. Good, fair, poor.

Stanley R. Peterson, "Evaluating Expository Writing," A Guide for Evaluating Student Composition. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965, p. 73.

Grading Guide

Content

Organization:
Rhetorical and Logical
Development

Organization: Diction
Sentence
Structure

Grammar,
Punctuation,
Spelling

Superior
(A-B)

A significant central idea clearly defined, and supported with concrete, substantial, and consistently relevant detail

Theme planned so that it progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages, and developed with originality and consistent attention to proportion and emphasis; paragraphs coherent, unified, and effectively developed; transitions between paragraphs explicit and effective

Sentences skilfully constructed (unified, coherent, forceful, effectively varied)

Distinctive: fresh, precise, economical, and idiomatic

Clarity and effectiveness of expression promoted by consistent use of standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Average
(C)

Central idea apparent but trivial, or trite, or too general; supported with concrete detail, but detail that is occasionally repetitious, irrelevant, or sketchy

Plan and method of theme apparent but not consistently fulfilled; developed with only occasional disproportion or inappropriate emphasis; paragraphs unified, coherent, usually effective in their development; transitions between paragraphs clear but abrupt, mechanical or monotonous

Sentences correctly constructed but lacking distinction

Appropriate: clear and idiomatic

Clarity and effectiveness of expression weakened by occasional deviations from standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling

32

Grading Guide (continued)

	Content	Organization: Rhetorical and Logical Develop- ment	Organization: Diction Sentence Structure	Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling
Unacceptable (D-F)	Central idea lacking, or confused, or unsupported with concrete and rele- vant details	Plan and purpose of theme not apparent; undeveloped or devel- oped with irrelevance, redundancy, or incon- sistency; paragraphs incoherent, not unified, or undeveloped; trans- itions between para- graphs unclear or ineffective	Sentences not unified, incoherent, fused, in- complete, monotonous, or childish	Inappropriate: Communi- cation ob- scured by frequent deviations from standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Prepared by Departments of English of Ball State University, Indiana State College, Indiana University
and Purdue University, published by cooperating institutions, pp. 1-4, 17-19. Used by permission of
Donald J. Gray.

V. GIMMICKS, TIME SAVERS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. TIME SAVERS

1. Correct part of the papers analytically; merely respond to others. Ask the first group to revise one time; the second can save and revise a second time around. Alternate groups, of course.
2. Correct only every third or fourth paper in the group. Hit on some representative problems for work in class by selecting from the papers those "in common" areas needing work.
3. Correct for only one or two pre-announced items; change the focus when you get to the next set by correcting an additional item at the same time you re-check to see if students mastered the first one(s).
4. Use student readers, organizing groups or teams for reading each other's work. Exchange for proofreading; exchange for response to the whole, or for response and comment on specific items: for instance, have a day when students read each other's work and discuss an item such as "effectiveness of beginnings." By all means, have students check on their own and others for spelling problems--let the class make the lists.
5. Use cassette recorded comments, pointing out both strong points and weaknesses in a recorded "conference." Ask students to take notes on the recorded comment, thereby making their own "terminal note" if you keep the cassette. Or have each student purchase a cassette and keep a series of comments so that these may be reviewed at the end of the class.
6. Do more with self-evaluation: have students write a "memo" to you (teach the form if you wish), telling you what they regard as strengths and weaknesses in their folder of papers or in a single paper.
7. Do a rapid survey of the class set in order to make the next day's lesson. This teaches everyone at once. (No individual marks needed--just a class list of items to work on.)

8. Establish some guidelines or a "rubric" to let students know what is expected in a paper or in papers throughout the course. Illustrate the use of the guides by going through several example papers with the group. This may even work to explain what you expect to give for grades.
9. Merely put checks on margins, then ask students to figure out the errors. They can perhaps do this exercise in groups or pairs of "editors."
10. Manage an individual conference as often as you can. Arrange these in class time if possible.

B. CREATIVE CORRECTING

Atticus to Scout: "You can't understand how somebody feels until you have walked around in his skin."

What is it to correct creatively?

1. to understand the process of writing, your own and that of others. Through understanding how the writer writes, you can detect the problems the student has in accomplishing his writing tasks.
2. to avoid glossing over, to resist being taken in. You do students a disservice if you encourage less than their best efforts.
3. to get at the heart of the matter, the base of difficulties. Not to stop with the superficialities, but to go to the causes, and thus to the cures.
4. to provide comments that will stimulate thought, spur ideas, and give the student-writer guideposts along the road to better writing.
5. to use correction in order to detect class needs so that follow-up lessons will aim toward improvement. Thus individuals help groups, the group helps the individual.
6. to delay grading, or to use it in an advisory way to assist the student toward improvement.
7. to expect, no--demand, that students follow through by acting on good suggestions (yours, their classmates).
8. to help students who don't like to write, "to like to have written."

from Professor Joyce Steward
University of Wisconsin-Madison

C. AA FOR THEME CORRECTORS

Achieve

1. The honest but humane response.
2. A nice proportion of positive to negative.
3. The tone of caring, conversing on paper.
4. The specific suggestion--in both positive and negative comments.
5. The comment that goes to the heart of the matter--this shows that you truly read the paper.
6. The ability to let some things wait--correct the important, keep your perspective and the student's.
7. Awareness of the "whole"--see the entire paper before judging its parts.
8. A suitable proportion between substance and mechanics, between content and style.
9. Guideposts for revision and improvement--the "something to grow on" comment.
10. Openness to questions and willingness to help toward a better next time.

Avoid

1. Both overpraise and the unnecessarily harsh.
2. The one-sided--all negative commendation.
3. The rubber stamp comment--this often means you haven't really read.
4. The vaguely general.
5. The superficial--"missing the mark."
6. Doing everything at once--this often annihilates.
7. Concentration on small parts--mutilation of one item.
8. Overstress on the merely mechanical.
9. The "no future" comment--finality.
10. The closed door--refusal to listen to the person involved in the writing process.

from Professor Joyce Steward
University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Obviously, if students write as much as they should, teachers cannot possibly read every word."

--Denny T. Wolfe

D. SUGGESTIONS AND GIMMICKS

1. Make definite suggestions for improving a paper under consideration, showing the student where revisions (in part, if not complete) will help him succeed in achieving his purpose for writing.
2. Keep in mind not only improvement of the paper under consideration but the future papers that the student will write. Put any one paper into a larger context.
3. Follow the evaluation with a re-check to see that the student makes use of the suggestions you give, either by revising or rewriting as he and you may decide profitable.
4. If a paper is a response to an assignment, mark in terms of what is expected. The criteria to be judged should, of course, be shared with the student when an assignment is made.
5. Make praise specific.
6. Help students become their own editors! Do not write for them--put in words, punctuation, new sentences, etc. Rather, guide them to the spots in need of work and let them do the revision or rewriting in the classroom.
7. Require students to read papers aloud as part of the proofreading process.

GIMMICKS

1. Have students make a scoring guide by listing those things they most appreciate seeing in one another's themes. Discussion of what to put in the guide, some determination of a hierarchy of values, and even the listing of drawbacks to good reading thus may give them a sense of what to look for in their writing and in that of classmates.
2. To balance comments on content and mechanics, the teacher can put content comments in the left-hand margin and mechanics comments in the right-hand margin.
3. To save time marking every paper and to give students a sense of what evaluation accomplishes, hand out one student paper as an example and have students read and criticize it overnight. The next day in class put a

copy of the paper on an overhead and have students discuss their criticism. This will get out comments on almost all errors that each student will have made in his own paper.

4. "Buddy Check List." A buddy reads another student's paper, checks it for clarity, punctuation, and spelling (or anything else you want to put on the checklist) and discusses it with him. The buddy has the checklist to use as a guide. When necessary corrections have been made, the buddy check list is attached to the paper and both paper and checklist are handed in.
5. "Horseshoe Arrangement." When children write, desks may be placed in a horseshoe arrangement. The teacher goes to each child in order, as many times as necessary. In this way every child receives help, encouragement, and instant evaluation.
6. If students write many short pieces, correct papers on an apparently random basis. That is, read carefully and comment on only a few papers in each set. Set up some schedule so that it appears that you are correcting randomly (so that students do not write well only when they are going to be checked), yet know that all students get an equal chance to have some of their writing read and evaluated carefully.
7. If papers need to be graded quickly, simply order them before assigning grades. Read the first paper; then read the next and decide whether it is better or worse than the first. If it is better, put it on top of the first; if it is worse, put it underneath. Continue until the papers are arranged from best to worst (most successful to least successful). Some rearrangement may be necessary. Decide on a curve. The papers or essay exams will usually fall into natural divisions. Assign grades and write comments after the ordering is complete.
8. Require frequent writing experiences but only grade a selected number of papers during a quarter or semester. Depending on the ages and abilities of students, determine the number of papers and the standard of quality necessary for acceptance.

GRADING ESSAY EXAMS

1. At the time the essay question is constructed write the criteria for grading the answer. What interpretations, theories, and ideas should be included? How much credit should be granted for the various parts of the essay?
2. Read the first several essay answers on a trial basis to make sure your expectations are realistic and get a feel for what the students have done.

3. If more than one essay question has been assigned, read all answers to question 1 first and then read all answers to question 2 and so on.
4. To achieve consistency in grading, place the answers in piles according to their grades, all "A's" in one pile, all "B's" in another pile and so on. After the first reading go through the piles and compare all of the "A's." One or two of the answers in a pile may not match with the others. Go on to the "B's" and so on.

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This source book gives specific lesson plans and ideas on units like "Letter Exchanges" and "Class Magazines." The units have been submitted by teachers who have used the materials in their classes.

Cooper and Odell. Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging. NCTE, Urbana, Illinois, 1977.

This "State of the Art" in evaluating written composition was published in 1977. Included are articles on Holistic evaluation, computer aided description, measuring changes in syntactic structures and intellectual processes, individualized goal setting, self-evaluation and peer evaluation.

Judine. A Guide for Evaluating Student Composition. NCTE, Urbana, Illinois, 1965.

Experts in the field of evaluation of writing comment on "The Audience," "The Evaluator," "The Total Writing Practice," and "Communication." Actual examples of evaluation are included.

Lundsteen. Help for the Teacher of Written Composition: New Directions in Research. ERIC Clearinghouse, Illinois, 1976.

This is a current overview of educational research relevant to teachers of writing. Ways of effectively incorporating research findings into classroom practice are suggested.

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This book consists of questions answered by experts in the fields of teaching and English. Answers are practical as well as thoughtful.

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Yahara School, Stoughton

Else Thompson
Columbus High School

Douglas VanDerBurg
Waunakee Elementary School

Diana L. Varner
Verona Middle School

Katherine E. Waack
Sun Prairie High School

Pat Woodring
West High School, Madison

Debbie Zache
Nichols Elementary School,
Monona